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Reform Club
(New York, N.Y.)

To the Honorable
Woodrow Wilson...

[New York]

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To The Honorable

Woodrow Wilson
President of the United States

A Presentation by the Trustees of the Reform Club of the
Alternative—War or Commercial Freedom
February Tenth, Nineteen
Hundred and Fifteen

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Calvin Tomkins, President
John G. Agar
Henry DeF. Baldwin
Milo R. Malby
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John J. Murphy
John DeWitt Warner
Alfred A. Whitman

New York City, February 10, 1915.

HON. WOODROW WILSON,
President of the United States,
Washington, D. C.

SIR:—The European war is only less harmful to the people of the United States and other neutral countries than to the combatants.

The influence of the neutral opinion of the world upon the war must progressively increase. As a contribution to public opinion in this country, the Trustees of the REFORM CLUB respectfully submit to you the accompanying statement of their views on the essential conditions of lasting peace.

CALVIN TOMKINS,
President.

WAR OR COMMERCIAL FREEDOM

The horror of war will not end war.

So long as conditions invite war it will recur.

If war is a necessary recurrence, nations must, and will, prepare for it. Militarism is not a cause, but an incident.

When we advocate the judicial settlement of national differences, backed by international force, we assume the continuance of the causes for war. International arbitrations can settle disputes which if not settled lead to international ill feeling and reprisals; but in view of what is now going on in Europe can any one believe that arbitration can deal with the real causes which bring on wars?

Consider the situation of the present belligerents.

Servia wants a window on the sea, and is shut out by Austrian influence. Austria wants an outlet in the east—Constantinople or Salonika.

Russia wants ice-free ports on the Baltic and Pacific, Constantinople, and a free outlet from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean.

Germany claims to be hemmed in by a ring of steel and needs the facilities of Antwerp and Rotterdam for her Rhine Valley commerce—security against being shut out from the east by commercial restrictions on the overland route, and freedom of the seas for her foreign commerce.

England must receive uninterrupted supplies of food and raw materials and her oversea communications must be maintained. This is true also of France, Germany, Belgium and other European countries.

Japan, like Germany, must have opportunity for her expanding population, industries and commerce.

The foreign policies of the nations still at peace are also determined by trade relations. Our own country desires the open door in the east.

South and North American States and Scandinavia are already protesting against the war's interference with their ocean trade.

All nations that are not in possession of satisfactory harbors on the sea demand outlets, and cannot, and ought not to be contented till they get them.

Nations desiring to extend their colonial enterprises entertain these ambitions for commercial reasons either to possess markets from which they cannot be excluded, or to develop such markets for themselves and be able to exclude others from them when they so determine.

THE DESIRE FOR COMMERCIAL PRIVILEGE AND FOR FREEDOM FROM COMMERCIAL RESTRAINT, IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF WAR.

Within recent years, world conditions have fundamentally changed. Steam and electricity have made the world smaller, and its peoples closer neighbors, and thus intensified both their sympathies and their antagonisms. Co-operation in investments through corporations and improved facilities in banking and promotion enables the smallest investor to place his capital in that part of the world which suits him best and this also intensifies sympathies and rivalry.

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interdependence of nations is demonstrated by the present war. The extent to which credit, transportation and exchange are paralysed and business everywhere dislocated shows the world to be more essentially a unit than was any considerable state only a short while ago. Commercial relations promote international goodwill. The one great obstacle to this tendency is the method by which industrial competition between the peoples of different states is carried on. Each state attempts to secure some exclusive privilege for its citizens, instead of insisting upon world-wide equality of opportunity—the open door.

Like other vices war is promoted for selfish gain. To protect their privileges, certain interests advance the theory of the economic rivalry of states. They seek to enlist a chauvinistic enthusiasm, based upon false inferences, to strengthen the mediæval theory of exclusive trade relations, which is only slowly yielding to economic forces.

However disguised, particular commercial and class interests are the fundamental though indirect causes of the intense nationalism of our time which has so often blazed into war.

Mr. Jacob Schiff has summarized the situation by saying "war can only be made to cease entirely if all the nations of Europe could be organized into a United States of Europe and if free trade were established throughout the world. In the first instance, the extreme nationalism, which has become so rampant during the past fifty years and which has been more or less at the bottom of every war, would then cease to exist and prevail, and in the second event, namely, if free trade became established throughout the world, the necessity for territorial expansion and aggression would no longer be needed, for with the entire world open on equal terms to the commerce and industry of every nation, territorial possession would not be much of a consideration to any people."

Mr. Schiff regards this as utopian. But there are differing kinds and degrees of restrictions upon trade.

FIRST.—There is the restriction of tariffs imposed by nations upon themselves (protectionism). Under existing circumstances, it must be left to the intelligent self-interest of the masses and the solvent influences of commerce to slowly overcome the delusions and the selfish private interests on which this obstruction is based.

SECOND.—There are restrictions upon the best uses for international commerce, of the terminal and land transfer facilities of the great trade routes and seaports of the world. A few such ports command entrance to and exit from vast continental hinterlands. It is vital to these interior regions that their natural communications with the outside world should be kept widely open, and this is equally vital to the rest of the world. Obstructive control of such ports and routes to the detriment of the world's commerce can not, and should not be tolerated by states whose interests are diversely affected.

But routes and ports are needed for use, not government; and port rivalries constantly tend towards offering the best and equal facilities to

all. The swelling tides of commerce are clearing their own channels, and mutual interests will more and more prompt the states through which the principal trade routes pass to facilitate the movement of commerce.

THIRD.—There are restrictions upon opportunities to trade with territories ruled as colonies, or being exploited within spheres of influence. This is what now remains of the old mercantile system which flourished before our Revolutionary War and which has been weakening ever since. Great Britain claims no preference for herself in her colonies. Other states have been less liberal. The fear of such restrictions being applied against them is to-day the main motive for a policy of colonial oversea possessions. If industrial states could be assured of the application of the open-door policy, no state would envy another its colonies. Colonies should be the world's commons.

FOURTH.—There are restrictions on the free use of the sea. Unlike land routes, ocean routes are offered practically without cost to all, whithersoever the sea runs. Over these, however, till modern times commerce has been subject to pillage by regular warships as well as by pirates. The claims of commerce have been more slowly recognized on the sea than on the land; and to an extent now unthinkable on land, warring states still feel free to interfere with neutral traders.

AT THE CLOSE OF THIS WAR MUST NOT THE CIVILIZED WORLD AGREE ON THE FREEDOM AND PROTECTION OF SEA TRADE AND A WORLD GUARANTEED PEACE ON THE SEA—EXCEPT AS WARSHIPS MAY FIGHT, OR PORTS BE CLOSED BY EFFECTIVE BLOCKADE?

In short, cannot our sea law be revised as our land law has already been, toward protecting the interests of peaceful commerce? Cannot the ancient conception of the sea as a wilderness where savagery still rules be changed to that of a highway kept open and safe under international sanction?

Such a policy would meet every legitimate aim of Germany and Great Britain. Its working would accelerate the development of every port for the impartial benefit of all who would need to use it; and thus serve the interests of Russia, Austria, Belgium and the Balkans.

Panama, Suez, Gibraltar, the Dardanelles, Kiel, the Sault, the Belt, the English Channel and less important straits might well be considered as the world's international highways through which commercial passage shall always be maintained on equal terms for all ships.

This is not all that might be done.

Rotterdam and Antwerp are the North Sea ports which naturally serve the trade of Central Europe, including that of Eastern France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Russia, and their neutral service, or at least that of the best equipped free port districts within them, as well as that of bonded railroads between them and interior countries, should be extended and guaranteed. The public opinion of the world should seek to influence similar freedom for international exchange at Constantinople, and at Adriatic, Ægean and China ports.

The Panama Canal ports, affected as they are with an international use, should be the first American ports adapted to this advance toward a free trade policy. Through the influence of President Wilson, the Panama Canal itself is now operated under conditions of equality for all.

American policy should seek to lead the opinion of the neutral nations; for it is neither the narrower interests of the combatants nor our own interests, but the opinion of the world's citizenship which should, and probably will, determine the results of the present war.

The world's desire and power to end the war in such a way as to avoid future wars will grow stronger as the enthusiasm of the fighting nations grows weaker.

The end of the war will see a new world. Men and women will be animated by new thoughts. It is not likely that the world will continue to tolerate attempted domination by any state or group of states. Nor will any state strong enough to assert itself acquiesce in the exclusion, permanent or temporary, of its trade from equal use of the natural avenues and facilities of commerce.

With freer commercial intercourse, the greater becomes the community of interests and the mutual interdependence of nations and the less important become their rivalries. Commercial and industrial forces are increasingly making their power felt. Why should we not yield to these influences now instead of waiting until more wars shall have wasted the world in the struggle for commercial emancipation?

This is not utopian; for in recent years, changes due to commercial development have been far more important than those due to dynastic or political causes. This will continue and international politics will be progressively subordinated to commercial needs—till wars shall cease.

We can accelerate this progress toward peace by international guarantees of free trade at sea and free access to the sea.

TRUSTEES, REFORM CLUB:

CALVIN TOMKINS, *President*.

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